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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

13 October 1955

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence  
SUBJECT : Preliminary Views on Molotov's Self-Criticism

1. We cannot assess the full significance of Molotov's public confession until the text of the Kommunist editorial which accompanied the letter of self-criticism is available for study.

2. In this letter, published in Kommunist on 8 October, Molotov confessed to having used a "theoretically mistaken and politically harmful" formula in describing the stage which the USSR had reached in its progress toward Communism. He recalled that in his report to the Supreme Soviet on 8 February, he had said: "together with the Soviet Union, where the foundations of a Socialist society have already been built, there are also those people's democratic countries which have taken only the first but very important steps in the direction of socialism." This mistaken formula, he explained, "leads to incorrect deductions that allegedly a socialist society has still

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not been built in the USSR, that only the foundations of a Socialist society have been built." He then went on to point out party decisions which had given the correct line.

3. Interpretations of the Molotov affair have tended to follow one or more of the following lines:

- a. Molotov's confession of doctrinal error is intended to provide a pretext for his removal or retirement. Over the past several months, and particularly since Soviet publication of Tito's attack on Molotov's 8 February speech, there have been a number of indications that Molotov was slipping and his dismissal imminent.
- b. The confession is an affirmation of the present line of Soviet foreign policy and is intended as a warning to those who, presumably like Molotov, were dragging their feet. This interpretation rests largely upon the evidence of the Kommunist editorial, which warned against excessive dogmatism, and boasted of the present success of the party in daringly combining adherence to principle with flexibility in foreign policy.

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- c. In addition to the above, the confession is intended in particular to affirm the correctness of the "Khrushchev-Bulganin" line toward Yugoslavia. This interpretation is suggested by the declaration in the Kommunist editorial that Communists must "combine respect for all that concerns the basic questions of Marxist-Leninist principles...with the greatest respect and tact in relation to the national feelings of peoples." The fact that the quotation at issue is concerned precisely with the Soviet-Satellite relationship, together with the fact that Molotov has been identified prominently with an anti-Tito policy, also suggests that the Yugoslav question may have been involved.

4. Our preliminary view is that these suggested interpretations probably all contain part of the truth, and are generally compatible with one another. We are less inclined to alternative (a) than to (b) and (c), mostly because this first interpretation is insufficient as an explanation for Molotov's disgrace. Since Molotov's removal could almost certainly have been carried off without his prior disgrace, his public confession must have had another and broader purpose.

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The choice of Molotov as penitent almost certainly is intended to convey the message that the policies with which he has been identified in the past have now been discarded by the Soviet leaders.

5. Close attention to theoretical writings during the next few months may throw further light on this question. A resolution of the XIXth Party Congress provided that a revision of the party program, which had not been modified since 1919, should be undertaken and presented to the next Congress which is to meet in February, 1956. The failure of the July Plenum to mention the revision may indicate that policy differences have prevented the drafting committee from completing this task. It is possible that Molotov's confession is connected with disputes over the party program.

6. On the question of the timing of the confession there are two possible explanations. On the one hand, the Soviet leaders may have intended a reduction of Molotov's stature on the eve of new Four Power talks in order the more easily to repudiate him should they wish subsequently to change their line. On the other hand, if alternatives b. and c. above are accepted as the probable explanations for Molotov's confession, the time lag from February to September would appear to have less significance.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



H. R. BULL  
Lt. Gen. USA (Retired)  
Acting Chairman

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